

**Poe Creek State Forest**  
**Forest Certification Management Plan**  
South Carolina Forestry Commission  
Working Document  
*February 2023*





## Table of Contents

1.	Forest Management Planning .....	5
A.	Forest Management Plan.....	5
B.	Convert One Forest Cover Type to Another.....	14
C.	Convert to Non-Forest Land Use.....	14
D.	Afforestation .....	14
2.	Forest Health and Productivity .....	14
A.	Reforestation .....	14
B.	Use of Chemicals .....	15
C.	Protect and Maintain Forest and Soil Productivity and Soil Health .....	15
D.	Damaging Agents.....	16
E.	Improved Planting Stock.....	18
3.	Protection and Maintenance of Water Resources .....	18
A.	Water Quality Laws and State BMP's.....	18
B.	Water, Wetland, and Riparian Protection Programs .....	19
4.	Conservation of Biological Diversity .....	20
A.	Biological Diversity .....	20
B.	Threatened and Endangered Species, Critically Imperiled Species, Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value, Forest of Recognized Importance, and Old- growth .....	21
C.	Ecologically Important Sites.....	22
D.	Research, Science, Technology, Field Experience Used to Contribute to Biological Diversity .....	22
5.	Management of Visual Quality and Recreational Benefits.....	22
A.	Impact of Harvesting on Visual Quality .....	22
B.	Clearcut Harvests .....	23
C.	Green-up Requirement.....	23
D.	Recreational Opportunities .....	23
6.	Protection of Special Sites .....	23
A.	Identify, Manage, and Protect Special Sites .....	24
7.	Efficient Use of Fiber Resources .....	24
A.	Forest Harvesting Technology, In-woods manufacturing Process to Minimize Waste and Ensure Efficient Utilization.....	24
8.	Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights .....	25
A.	Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights .....	25
B.	Confer with Possibly Affected Indigenous Peoples.....	25
C.	Communicate and Respond to Possibly Affected Indigenous Peoples .....	26
9.	Climate Smart Forestry .....	26
A.	Identify and Address Risk to Forest and Forest Operations .....	26
B.	Effects Associated with Forest Operations .....	27
10.	Fire Resilience and Awareness .....	27
A.	Limit Susceptibility to Undesirable Impacts of Wildfire, Promote Healthy and Resilient Forest Conditions, and Support Restoration of Forest Damaged by Wildfire .....	27
B.	Raise Awareness of Benefits of Fire Management and Minimize Undesirable Impacts of Wildfire .....	28

11.	Legal and Regulatory Compliance.....	28
A.	Local Forestry and Environmental Laws and Regulations .....	28
B.	Comply with all Applicable Social Laws .....	29
12.	Forestry Research, Science and Technology .....	29
A.	Provide In-Kind Support or Funding for Forest Research.....	29
B.	Develop, Contribute to, or Use Analyses in Support of Sustainable Forestry..	30
13.	Training and Education.....	31
A.	Appropriate Training of Personnel and Contractors .....	31
B.	Foster Improvement in the Professionalism of Wood Producers .....	31
14.	Community Involvement in the Practice of Sustainable Forestry .....	31
A.	Landowner Cooperative Programs .....	31
B.	Public Outreach, Education, and Involvement .....	32
C.	Stakeholder Concerns .....	32
15.	Public Land Management Responsibilities.....	32
A.	Public Land Planning and Management Processes.....	33
16.	Communications and Public Reporting .....	33
A.	Summary Audit Report .....	33
B.	Annual Conformance Report .....	33
17.	Management Review and Continual Improvement .....	33
A.	Review System.....	34

# 1. Forest Management Planning

## A. Forest Management Plan

Poe Creek State Forest (PCSF), located in Oconee and Pickens counties, consists of approximately 2,513 acres of mixed pine and hardwood species native to the upstate of South Carolina. PCSF is managed as two discontinuous tracts of land. Tract 24 was purchased from Crescent Resources, Inc. on April 6, 1999. This area has steep terrain and is limited in what forest management can occur or needs to occur. Tract 25 referred to as, The Piedmont Forestry Center has a long history of service to the agency, serving in the past as a regional nursery. The property consists of several facilities, field openings, orchard, progeny testing, etc. Due to the recreational use, steep topography, and other restrictions, there is little opportunity for intense forest management on the property. Soil types consist of 97% sandy loam. See Figure 1 for soils map. PCSF is managed to be a healthy, productive, forested ecosystem, while improving the quality of life in South Carolina through the environmental, educational, economic, and recreational benefits of active forest management.

PCSF objectives are to maintain fiscal self-sufficiency via optimization of forest products and other possible revenue streams, maintain biological sustainability, and maintain as public lands for the benefit of the state and its citizens. PCSF leans more to the recreational and wildlife management side of things, due to the steep terrain and timber markets in the area. PCSF objectives are in line with the agency's mission to protect, promote and enhance the forest lands of South Carolina in a manner consistent with achieving the greatest good for its citizens.

PCSF practices principles of high-quality multiple-use and sustained-yield forest management. Multiple use management includes enhancing timber production, fish and wildlife habitat, air and water quality, soil conservation, scenic beauty, scientific research, and recreational opportunities. It does not mean that all uses must coexist at the same time. Depending on the circumstances on different parts of the forest, one use might be dominant while other uses are subordinated. Sustained yield means assuring that the renewable resources of the forest will always be available without impairing the productivity of the land.

The state forest system is mandated to be self-supporting; PCSF generates revenue through timber sales, rental fees, recreational permit fees, and land leases. A unique situation for our state forests is a law requiring that we give 25% of our gross income to the school district in which the revenue was generated. Therefore, within the scope of our management approach, and our attempt to provide the people of South Carolina with the greatest and best use of the forest, we do so with the over-arching requirement that significant revenue be generated.

PCSF encompasses approximately 2,513 acres. Much of the land base is dominated by 45% hardwood, with pine stands comprising 31% of the forest, mixed pine/hardwood

stands making up 19%, and the remaining 5% being non forested areas. PCSF dominant pine types are loblolly pine comprising 636 acres, followed by virginia pine, white pine, and shortleaf pine containing 144 acres. Upland hardwood is the dominant hardwood type, with 1,137 acres. See Figure 2 for forest cover type map.

PCSF is divided into 2 discontinuous tracts. Within these tracts, stands are delineated at an appropriate scale for management application (Figures 3 and 4). Data for these stands is maintained in a GIS database, which contains all relevant stand level data and all other environmental databases that includes information on roads, soils, hydrology, threatened and endangered species, invasive species, elevation, and other data as needed. Data is obtained from many different state and federal agencies, or developed in-house where applicable.

PCSF is a vital part of the local and regional landscape in which it occurs. PCSF provides many benefits to the citizens of Oconee and Pickens counties and South Carolina through sustainable management of its resources. Benefits include jobs, a steady source of timber fiber, clean water, soil protection, revenue for school districts through tourist and income requirements, recreational opportunities, etc. PCSF is one of many public landowners along the highway 11 corridor and has boundary on both sides of Lake Jocassee and numerous indirect impacts to the local watershed.

PCSF is currently utilizing a combination of historical and current inventory data, and area regulation in conjunction with a simple pine growth and yield model created and provided by University of Florida in conjunction with US Department of Agriculture Forest Service and the Florida Forest Service to determine annual harvesting limits. There-by also assuring long-term resource sustainability. Inventory data is systematically being collected to refine current stand conditions and assist in management recommendations.

Our current forest inventory program covers two stand types: 0-10 years old and 11+ years old. The SCFC implements both fixed area and variable radius plots in this cruise. Sampling intensity is determined by stand acres and density, and plot type is determined by cover type. The objective for cruisers will be to provide a stand level assessment and to collect and record accurate plot and tree level data. Sampling intensity of this project follows an overall criterion of roughly a 5x5 chain plot spacing in stands to accomplish an overall intensity of 1 plot per 4 acres (minimum of 5 plots per stand). This inventory method allows us to account for changes in growth due to productivity increases and decreases. This will allow for us to input updated inventory data into our harvest model runs, thus allowing for better growth and yield values. Plot hound software is utilized for data collection and evaluation.

Figure 5 shows tables and charts that shows PCSF annual pine growth per acre per year and annual total standing volume per acre per year. Figure 6 shows that our actual harvested tons are not exceeding our annual growth. Because such little harvesting is happening at PCSF due to topographical issues, we use our annual growth as our allowable harvest values.

To keep up with all the different management practices, we have several in-house documentation forms used to track management activities. These forms are updated when needed and stored on the agency employee website under State Forest. Forms include harvest contracts, tree planting contracts, herbicide use contracts, activity planning document, activity check document, etc.

## **Stand Descriptions**

### Piedmont Forestry Center (Tract 25)

The Piedmont Forestry Center contains several facilities that are available for rental, located within the central region of the property in Cheohee Valley. As such, management focus is much different than other parts of the forest. Any harvest activity must be done in consideration of the viewshed, and overall experience of the users.

In addition, a mitigation project was completed along Cheohee Creek, prominent stream feature that runs the course of the valley and bisects the Piedmont Forestry Center property. This mitigation project has placed the stream, the streamside management zone, and almost 10 acres of upland hardwood into a long-term conservation bank, and thus not available for harvesting. Plans for including more sections of Cheohee Creek into a mitigation bank have been discussed, but at this time no definitive action has been determined. However, the use of this creek for recreational purposes, including daily use visitors and an annual fishing derby for children, would dovetail with future mitigation efforts.

The adjacent valley ridges surrounding Cheohee Valley are characterized by steep slopes and forested in upland hardwoods, mixed stands, and virginia pine. Due to viewshed considerations, these areas also are not available for intense forest management. A weak regional forest products market also reduces financial gains from harvesting, and in areas where other uses/concerns are present, limit harvest activity to stand/species replacement and issues relating to forest health.

### Poe Creek State Forest (Tract 24)

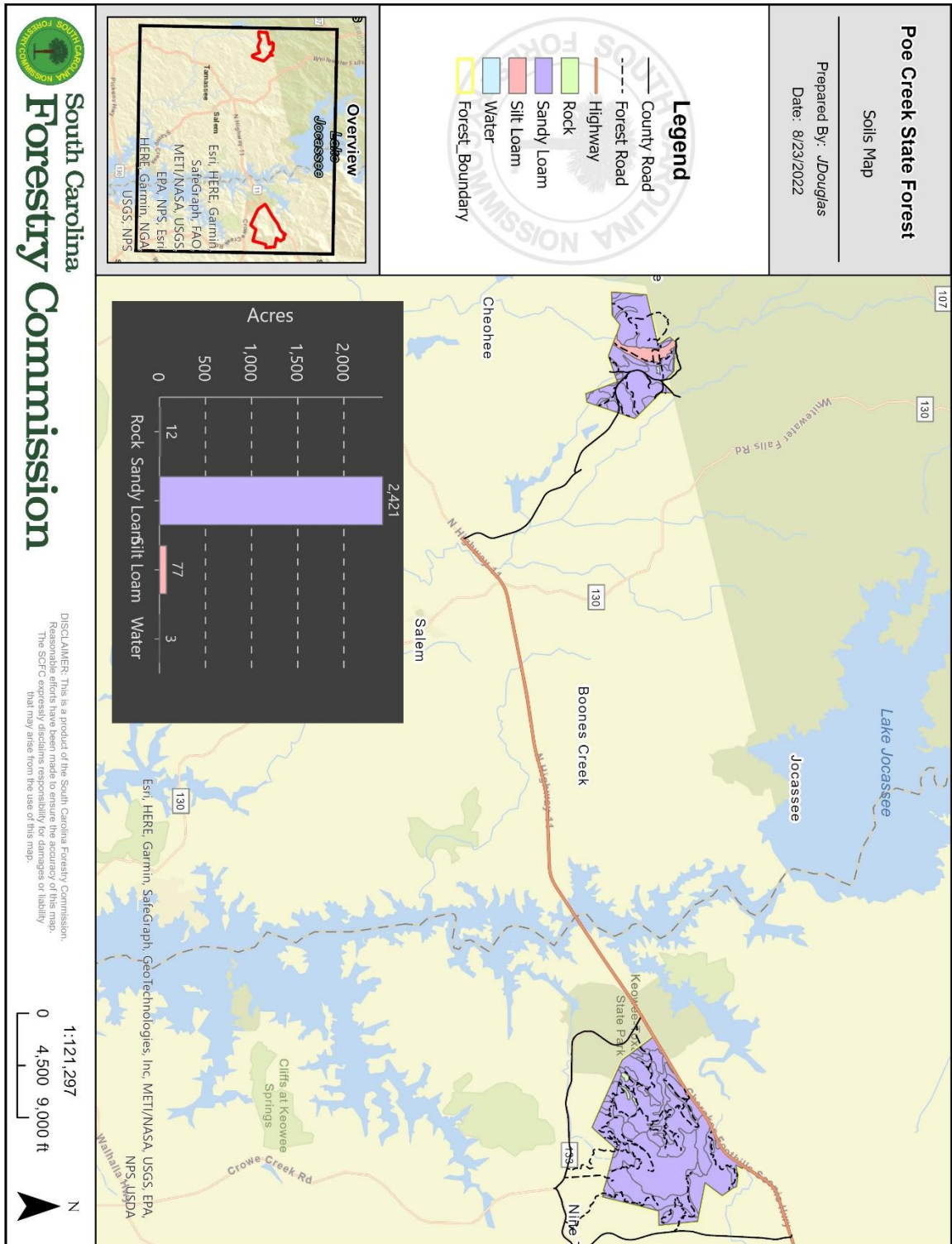
This larger tract of the management unit is primarily used for recreational purposes; however, no facilities are managed on the property by the agency. A small portion of the property is leased to a local agency and managed as Long Shoals Recreation Area along Little Eastatoe creek, a roadside recreational facility opens for public use. Stand 10, an upland hemlock hardwood stand immediately adjacent to Long Shoals, will not be managed for timber production due to recreational considerations, stream management concerns, and species management.

The majority of Poe Creek consists of a large tract of upland hardwoods (see figure 3, stands 29 and 30), with steep topography and limited access preventing these stands from being considered for active timber harvesting.

Stands occupying lower slopes positions have road access and the potential for some management. Stands are thinned on an as-needed basis, and where possible. Previous thinning operations have illustrated the difficulty in access, with some portions of the harvest areas left unthinned due to operator judgement.



**Figure 1. Poe Creek State Forest Soils Map**



**Figure 2. Poe Creek State Forest Cover Type**

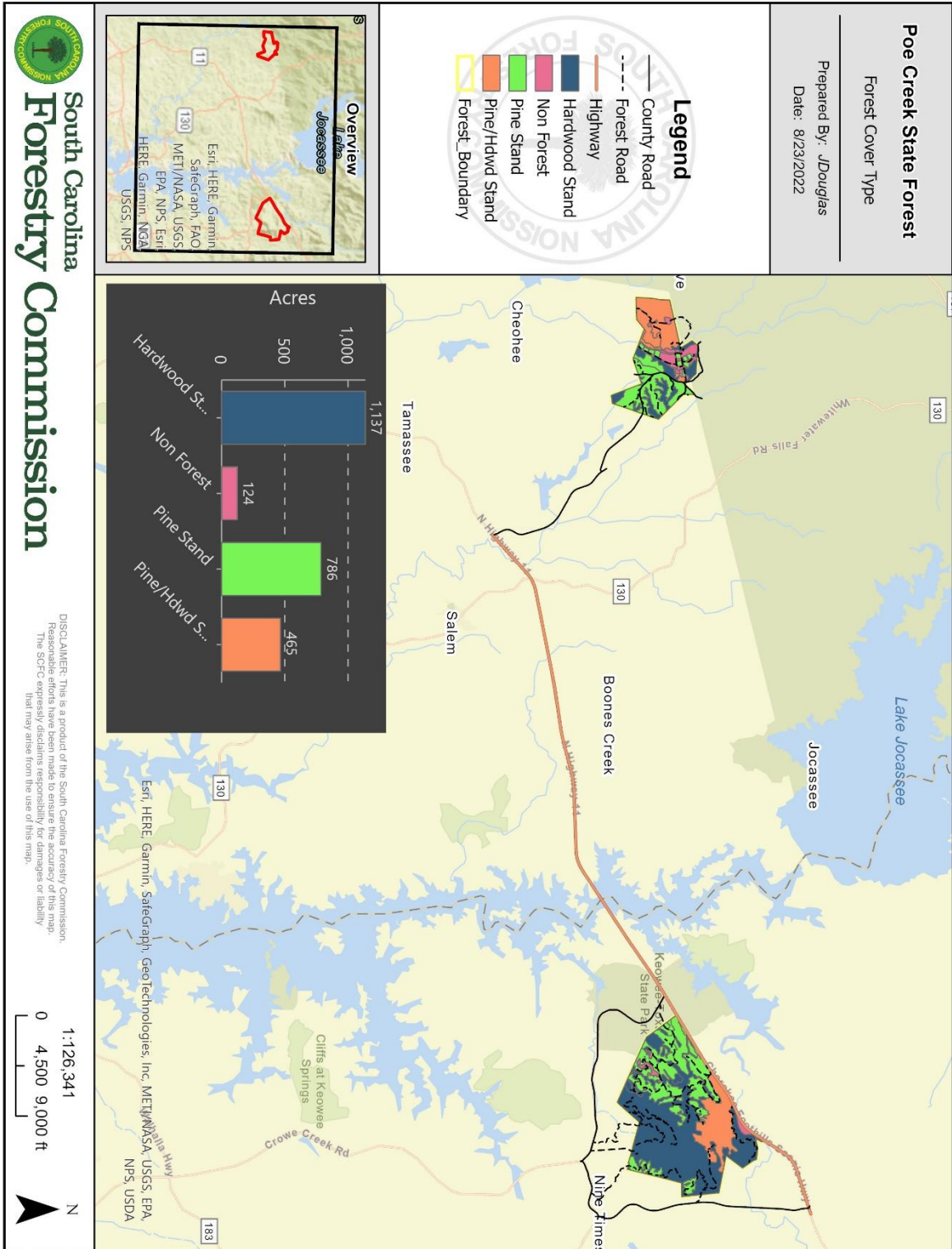


Figure 3. Poe Creek State Forest Block 1 stand delineations

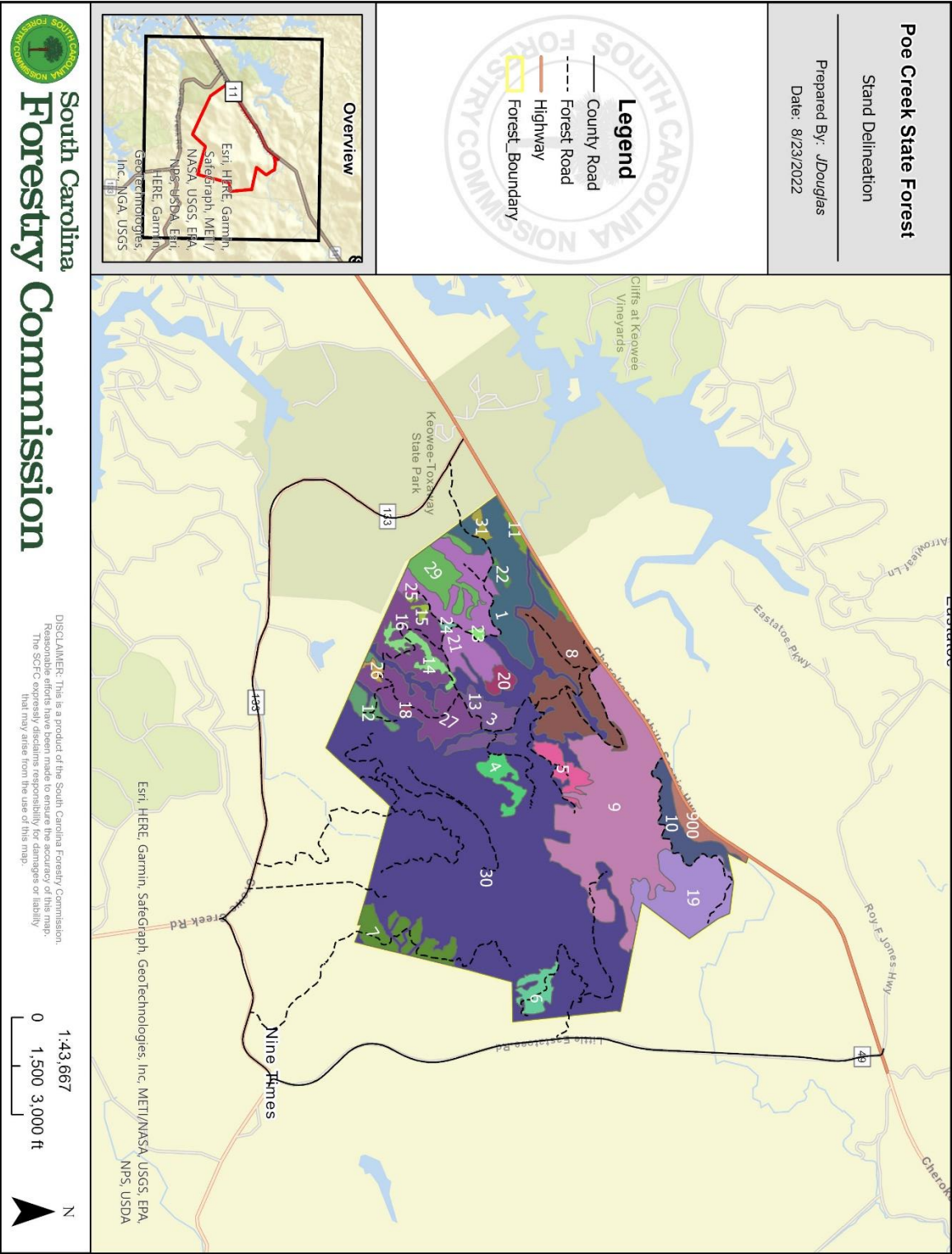
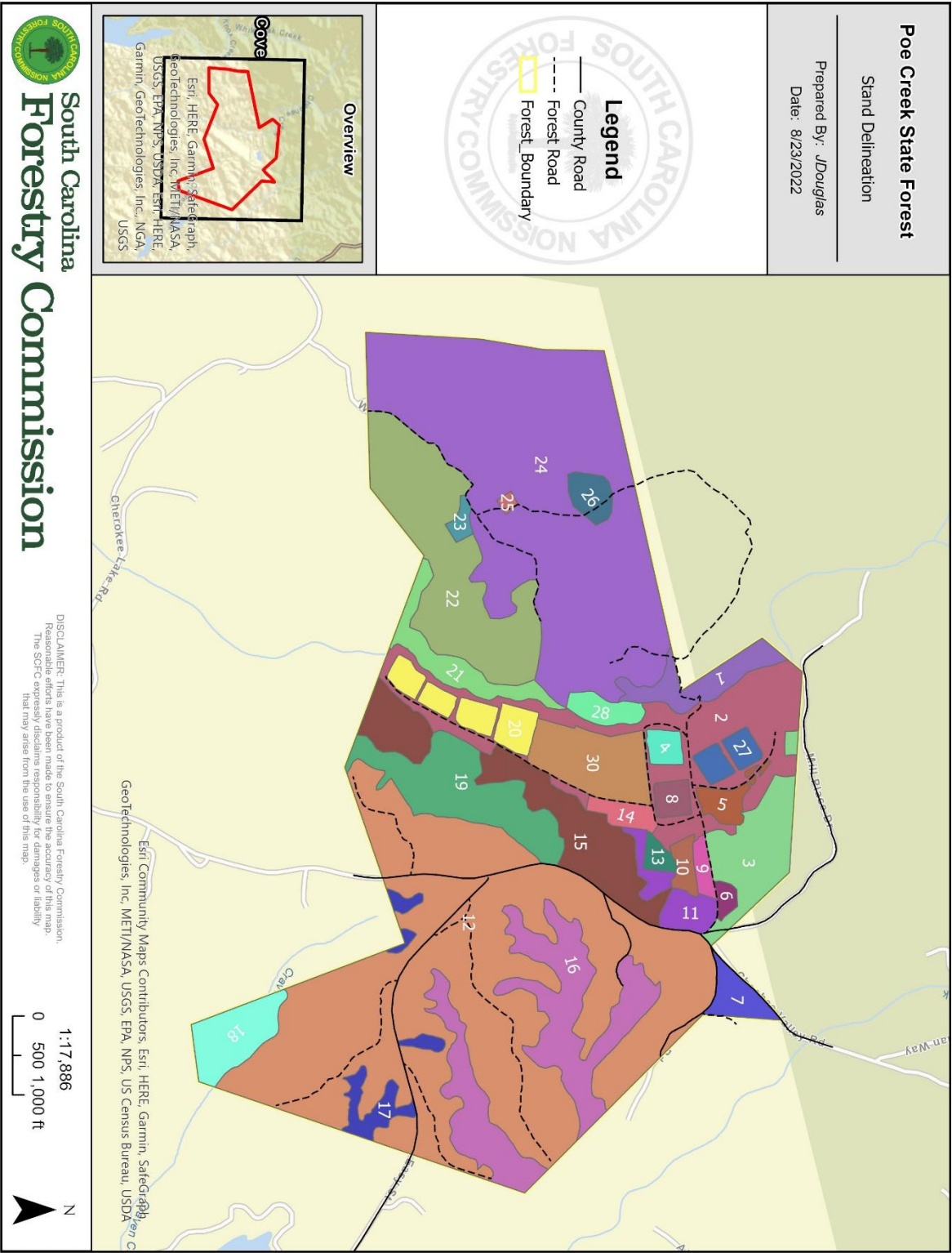
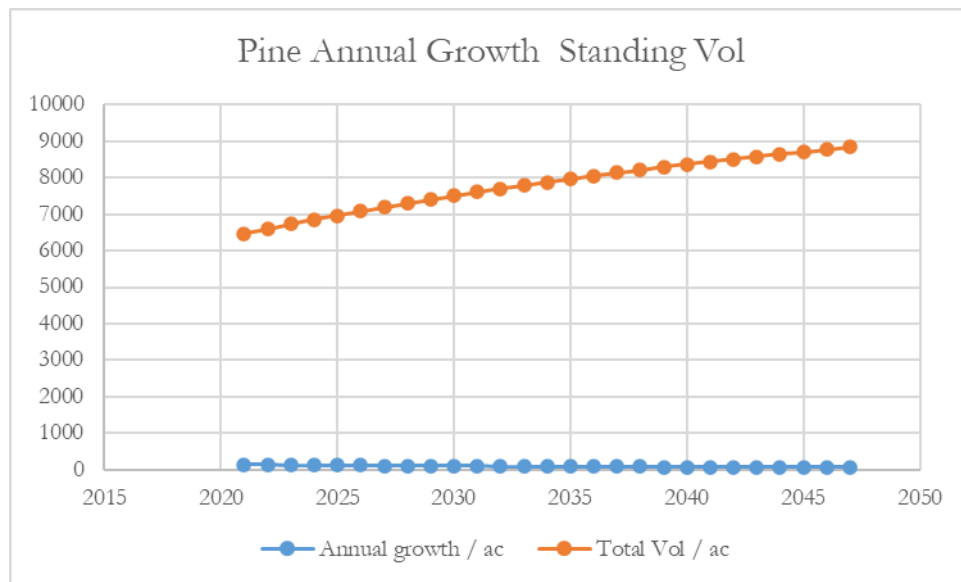
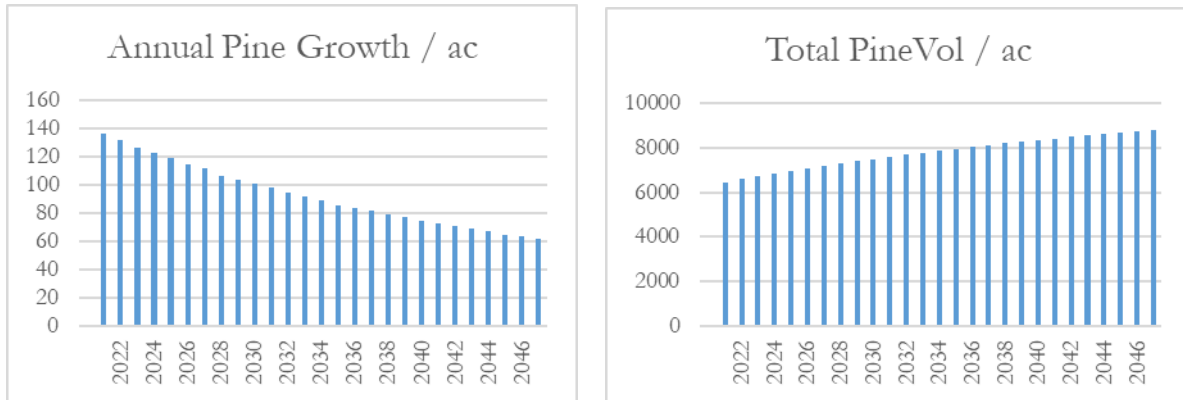




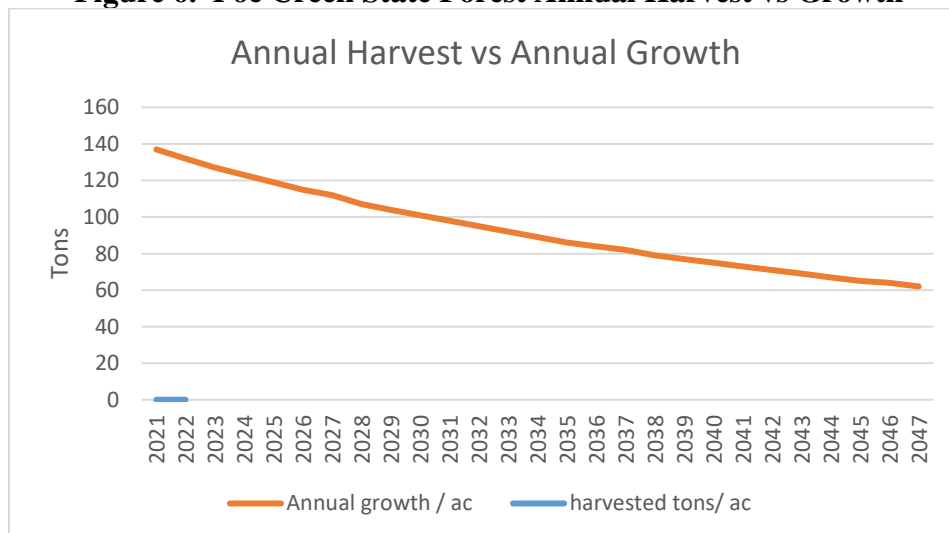
Figure 4. Poe Creek State Forest Block 2 stand delineations



**Figure 5. Poe Creek State Forest Annual Growth N Yield and Removals**



**Figure 6. Poe Creek State Forest Annual Harvest vs Growth**



### **B. Convert One Forest Cover Type to Another**

PCSF only considers converting forest cover type to another if the land is better suited for a different cover type and no adverse impacts on forest with exceptional conservation value, old growth forests, forest critical to threatened and endangered species, or special sites are affected. For the most part, whatever is in place currently is what the stand will be replaced with. Specific species planted will be evaluated for best acceptable based on environmental and social suitability.

### **C. Convert to Non-Forest Land Use**

PCSF has no intentions of converting forestland to non-forestland outside of the occasional establishment of wildlife food plots, forest access roads, recreational trails, etc. If a very rare and unique circumstance would occur, we would withdraw the acreage from certification immediately.

### **D. Afforestation**

Any area thought to be in consideration for afforestation will be given great consideration for surrounding forest cover type and activities. Sites will be evaluated for potential species compatibility and no negative impacts to natural communities, due to afforestation of site. PCSF will examine soil types, productivity, and native ranges to determine appropriate species for planting.

## **2. Forest Health and Productivity**

### **A. Reforestation**

Artificial and natural reforestation decisions are dependent on current stand cover type and desired future cover type. The following provides an overview of how we approach reforestation; however, some deviation may be expected on an individual basis.

In much of our pine forest, where we are either replacing a stand with the same desired species or replacing to a more desirable pine species, our plan includes artificial regeneration. In our hardwood forests, we typically allow for natural regeneration following a rotational harvest. In mixed pine/hardwood stands with a significant pine component or site conditions favorable for pine, we typically will use artificial regeneration to plant the stand to a more desirable composition of pine.

Planting is conducted generally in the late fall through early winter, in year one or two after final harvest. Planting is conducted by contract using trained tree planters, through a bid proposal process, as required by South Carolina state law. Monitoring of the planting operation is conducted to ensure proper spacing and planting depth are maintained, as outline in planting contracts.

To determine adequate stocking after planting, we sample 0.5% of each stand through seedling survival checks in early spring, one-year following planting. If survival is below 40% or stand condition is poor, we replant the entire stand or do an addition

survival check the next year. If survival is below 60% or stand condition is poor or moderate/poor, we replant entire stand if mortality is equally distributed or in plant if mortality is localized or consider chemical release or consider prescribe burn for release or do an addition survival check the next year. If survival is below 90% or stand condition is moderate/poor to moderate, we would consider in planting if mortality is localized or chemical release or prescribe burn for release. If survival is above 90% or stand condition is moderate to acceptable, we would consider chemical release or prescribe burn for release or no action. In stands where natural regeneration is chosen, spot sampling is conducted within the first 5 years to determine stand composition and stocking.

## ***B. Use of Chemicals***

PCSF primary use of chemicals consist of site preparation for pine planting, pine release after planting, understory control, and agriculture use. Most chemicals used in forested stands is done through contract labor, through a bid proposal process as required by SC state law. Agricultural use is limited to dove fields and wildlife food plots. Chemicals used and rates applied are chosen based on the least amount of chemical required to achieve management objectives and label intent and requirements. The amount of chemical used is based on results from past usage.

PCSF is aware of and does not use chemicals listed under the World Health Organization (WHO) type 1A and type 1B, unless no other alternative is available, and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. Reference material can be found on the agency employee website under the state forest section.

We consider integrated pest management as part of our overall management of PCSF, through promoting healthy and vigorous stands of timber. By conducting thinnings in timely manners, stands are reduced to include the strongest and healthiest tress to mature. Other factors involved are selecting appropriate species and seedling varieties depending on sight specifications. We are continuously participating in diverse training opportunities to keep up with new and evolving pest. Our agency insect and disease personnel conduct pest trapping to determine possibilities of outbreaks. We use our inventory system to monitor stands for potential problems that may arise.

PCSF currently has one person acquiring a license as a pesticide applicator. This person uses state forest chemical application report forms to document in-house use and contractor use of pesticides to ensure environmental protection agency (EPA) guidelines and product labels are adhered to.

PCSF has adopted a plan and procedure for chemical and oil spills. We keep on file a document for this procedure and an on-hand spill kit.

## ***C. Protect and Maintain Forest and Soil Productivity and Soil Health***

We outline in all contracted harvesting operations that Best Management Practices (BMPs) be adhered to, skid rows and decks be minimized in size and impact to the site, and field personnel monitoring the harvest address any violations or areas of concerns

as they occur. A performance bond is part of the contract to ensure all post-harvest clean-up work is conducted. We also notify and request agency BMP foresters to preform BMP courtesy exams on all harvesting operations.

In some portions of the forest, particularly our upland slopes, we work with timber contractors to allow for seasonal access to timber to mitigate any problems associated with regular and infrequent rain events. In some cases, we may provide for extensions to our harvest contracts to minimize this impact.

We require that the site be left to specific conditions that are beneficial to subsequent harvesting, but since we use hand crews to artificially plant, we allow for retention of large woody debris and tops. Site preparation may include prescribed fire application to minimize the obstruction this harvesting debris may pose.

#### ***D. Damaging Agents***

We consider forest health as many-faceted. Impacts to forest health are many, and this section addresses first our approach to natural disasters and forest management, the subsequent risks from more common health issues, such as insect and disease outbreaks.

There are several natural disasters that may affect our state forest lands, though primarily wildfires, flooding events and hurricanes/windstorms are considered the most likely. Indeed, the impacts of these types of events have been recurring and constitute a significant factor in how many of our management operations can take place.

##### ***Wildfire/Prescribe Fire***

Fire is a natural part of the forest ecosystem across much of the state forest system. We maintain a program of prescribed fire management, both to enhance the condition of the forest stands while also serving to mitigate wildfire risk through forest fuels reduction. All fire line employees go through extensive, continually training to be allowed to participate in prescribe burning. Along with the training, annually we do fire line refreshers and moderate level pack testing to remain fire line certified.

Forest personnel use prescribed fire in many instances: site preparation, fuels reductions, timber stand improvement, aesthetics, and improved habitat through species management. Our personnel are trained and licensed through the agency, and we maintain a high level of fire preparedness. All burns are overseen by a certified prescribe fire manager and documentation such as burn plans and weather outputs are maintained, as documentation of objectives met.

However, periods of time exist where the risk of uncontrolled wildfire on State Lands is high. In such cases, the South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC), being recognized as the agency with authority over containing and suppressing all wildfire on both State and private lands, is readily equipped to address fires on Poe Creek State Forest by trained personnel.

##### ***Flooding***



Flooding poses a minimal risk at Poe Creek State Forest, of short duration, and only along existing stream and creek bottoms. Access during these events may be limited, and some road improvements may be required post flooding. Timber harvest activities at Poe Creek are generally limited to regeneration harvests potentially up to 100 acres in size, however size is usually limited to 50 acres or less. Adjacency restrictions are adhered to as described in our management section. When needed, buffer strips are used to protect our riparian zone forest, and some thinning may be conducted in these stands as needed. Thinning is done in accordance with BMPs and help to maintain a healthy forest while providing some addition revenue.

### ***Hurricanes***

While small-scale wind events occur frequently across the forest, we consider the damages and management implications to be generally small and can be addressed on an individual basis. Large-scale wind events, primarily hurricanes, are an inevitability in the Southeastern Coastal United States.

Due to being farther removed from the coastal area, damage from hurricanes at Poe Creek is considered to be minimal. Through thinning operations, we maintain stands with adequate spacing which reduces windthrow susceptibility.

As a part of the states' Incident Management Team (IMT), we have an enhanced ability to address the immediate effects of a hurricane event. Through training, maintenance, and readiness planning, we can open roads, provide access, and generally address user safety immediately after an incident.

### ***Ice Storms***

The risk of ice storms in the northwestern region of South Carolina is moderate and does occur on an irregular cycle. Salvage logging will be performed, where possible, in the event of impact on any portion of the forest.

### ***Insect and Disease Risks***

We consider active forest management, and maintenance of stands in a healthy and vigorous growing condition, as the most important approach to reducing impacts from insects and disease. Additionally, regular prescribed fire is used to promote forest health. Our location in central SC is also favorable for reduced planting risks from several species of insects. Still, we monitor our forest and address these risks on an as-needed basis.

Some monitoring of the state forest is conducted as part of state-wide initiatives, but we generally address areas of concern as they develop. Where possible, we minimize the impact or spread of the outbreak through harvesting, a successful and recommended approach to some insect control. All such activities are incorporated into the planned harvest activity, and subsequent runs of our harvest schedule model will account for the experienced changes to the stand condition and associated inventory levels.

Our most important data collected for forest health is our forest inventory data, used to determine the timing of harvest operations. This data focuses on standard metrics needed to develop growth and yield models, including trees per acre, basal area, species, individual trees measurements of diameter at breast height, stopper height (height to first defect), and total height. If no defect is found, we use total tree height to develop volume estimates.

Other types of assessments that may apply include regional studies conducted by our agency's insect and disease laboratory, which monitors for outbreaks and insect population measures, and general day-to-day assessments by on-site field personnel.

### ***Invasive Species***

PCSF handles invasive species on an as needed basis. Invasive species are documented, monitored, and controlled, if deemed necessary. Some of the known species that exists on PCSF are Kudzu, Wisteria, Mimosa, Bradford pear, wild hogs, coyote, and armadillo.

The state forest system has a form used for documentation of invasive species located on its website. Our website also contains reference material on our website from the NatureServe, Millers's 2006 Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests, Hamrick et al. 2011 Wild Hog Management Guide provided by the Mississippi State University Extension Service, and the SCDNR coyote control.

### ***E. Improved Planting Stock***

PCSF utilizes improved planting stock of loblolly pine. Genetically Improved seedlings are purchased from the Arborgen, Taylor Nursery, which is in a contract with the SCFC. In-house tree improvement staff are consulted to determine adequate genetic selection.

PCSF allows portions of its property to be used for research for improved planting stock through progeny sites or other research needs. The SCFC is a part of the Southeastern Tree Improvement Co-op, run by North Carolina State (NCST).

## **3. Protection and Maintenance of Water Resources**

### ***A. Water Quality Laws and State BMP's***

The South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) is the lead agency in South Carolina in designing, interpreting, monitoring, and updating forestry best management practices (BMPs) that protect water quality and conserve site productivity. BMPs are science-based forest management practices, developed pursuant to federal water quality legislation, that minimize or prevent nonpoint source water pollution from forestry operations and give forest landowners and the forestry community guidelines to follow in practicing good stewardship on our valuable forestland. BMP

implementation protects the quality of our drinking water and helps sustain the productivity of our forests for future use.

As part of the SCFC, the state forests lands, including Poe Creek State Forest (PCSF), will serve as a model for BMP implementation. They should meet or exceed all established BMPs, all applicable state water quality laws, and the requirements of the clean water act for forestland. State forests will make all efforts necessary to ensure that there are no negative impacts to water quality or site productivity from forestry operations (i.e., forest road construction, timber harvesting, site preparation, reforestation, prescribed burning, pesticide application, fertilization, or minor drainage) on their lands.

In addition, all state forest employees involved in the supervision of forestry operations will be required to have appropriate BMP training (i.e. Timber Operations Professional or equivalent), and all contractors operating on state forests will be required to have appropriate BMP training (i.e. Timber Operations Professional or equivalent) and will be responsible for BMP compliance on their work site. State forests will include this requirement in all bid invitations and contracts.

## ***B. Water, Wetland, and Riparian Protection Programs***

PCSF waters flow into the Seneca River which is a tributary of the Savannah River system. We are aware of water quality and quantity issues and follow good forest management practices to conserve both.

As previously mentioned, our agency is the lead agency in BMP monitoring for the state, and as such we include guidelines for maintaining their use in our timber sale contracts. Site conditions over much of the forest reduce the need for extensive road and landing design, however in areas where the concern exists our staff works closely with harvest operators to best locate their decks and skid trails.

PCSF is aware of existing ponds, hardwood branches, and bottomland hardwood forest requiring regular monitoring for water quantity. Special attention is shown to these areas whenever any harvesting or management activities takes place in their vicinity. PCSF receives communication from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental (SCDHEC) whenever there are potential impacts to ponds from hazardous weather.

Our GIS contains several hydrology layers, including streams and other water bodies, and these layers are used to identify areas of concern in stands before harvesting is conducted. Field foresters make on-the-ground assessments for BMP use, and design stand boundaries in accordance. In cases where there is concern with BMP adherence or rules, we use our agency personnel in charge of BMP monitoring to assist in making management decisions.

Our harvest contract requires compliance with BMP use, and the inclusion of a performance bond to promote BMP use or pay for remediation work, as needed. We make agency personnel in charge of BMP monitoring aware of all harvest and request a courtesy BMP exam be done on all our harvest contracts.

PCSF addresses wet weather events through contracts and working relationships with loggers and other contractors to maintain water quality. All contractors are to adhere to BMP guidelines. The forest director or his representative have the right to stop any ongoing work that may cause a water quality issue. All logging operations are subject to a courtesy exam by a BMP forester with the SCFC. PCSF can also withhold some or all a logger's performance bond. PCSF foresters and technicians perform activity maintenance checks weekly on all forest management jobs.

## **4. Conservation of Biological Diversity**

### **A. Biological Diversity**

Having such a natural range of species composition across our forest, we find our current management approach, adequately provides for a range of species, habitats, and ecological communities. Poe Creek State Forest (PCSF) is aware of South Carolina's Statewide Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy developed by the SC Forestry Commission (SCFC) and the SC Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

PCSF contains a wide range of habitats including diversity within stands and across the landscape. This mix of forest types provides excellent habitat for many wildlife species, both game and non-game. Many forest management activities are beneficial to game species of wildlife. Practices such as thinning, prescribed burning, planting beneficial tree species, and supplemental wildlife food plots encourage a variety of game species. White-tailed deer, bobwhite quail, mourning dove, and eastern wild turkey are the most prevalent game species in our forests. Other species, including rabbit, gray squirrel, fox squirrel, and waterfowl are also present. The streams and ponds on state forests contain excellent fishing opportunities.

PCSF is enrolled in the SCDNRs Wildlife Management Area (WMA) program, which allows public hunting opportunities. Through this cooperative agreement, SCDNR monitors the health of game species and provides recommendations and funding to maintain and increase populations. Forest management activities should be planned to maximize the benefits to game species by considering appropriate timing of an activity, size of the affected area, and spatial arrangement.

Non-game wildlife species play an important role in management planning and prescriptions on state forests. Threatened and endangered wildlife species and species of concern, including the green salamander, and neo-tropical migratory birds are considered when forest management activities take place. Endangered species populations are managed with input from SCDNR and the US Fish & Wildlife Service

(USFWS), utilizing appropriate habitat management measures to increase and maintain populations. Where sensitive species are known to occur, particular concern should be given to reducing fragmentation of habitat, maintaining and creating additional high-quality habitat, and complying with the Endangered Species Act.

As part of the WMA program, key assessments of wildlife are taken by the SCDNR, although forest staff frequently assist in population monitoring for the SCDNR upon request. Subsequent hunting regulations, dates and times, and seasonal availability are determined in cooperation with SCDNR to maintain a healthy forest wildlife community.

***B. Threatened and Endangered Species, Critically Imperiled Species, Forests with Exceptional Conservation Value, Forest of Recognized Importance, and Old Growth***

As we implement our harvest schedule and develop site-specific plans for product removal, particularly adjacent to areas of concern, we inspect for presence of species and make changes to our long-term plans accordingly. Additionally, we request in our harvest contract that operators also notify us if any species of concern that are located.

According to SCDNR Heritage Preserve data as of 8/23/2022, six G2 species were recognized as once occurring in the vicinity of PCSF. These six species included West Virginian White (2008), Smooth Purple Coneflower (NA), Sunfacing Coneflower/Pineywoods Coneflower (2018), Northern Long-eared Bat (1996), Mountain Sweet Pitcherplant (1996), and Tricolored Bat (2019). Other species of interest by federal and state protection include Eastern Smallfooted Bat (1993) and Rafinesque's Big-eared Bat (2016). PCSF is aware of an existing population of Mountain Sweet Pitcher Plant (G2) within our boundaries; therefore, we are considered a forest with exceptional conservation values (FECV).

As a representative of unique values associated with exceptional ecological, social, cultural, and biological conservation, PCSF considers itself to be a forest of recognized importance (FORI). At the landscape level, PCSF is one of many public landowners in the Northwestern corner of the state and is open to daily public activities and use. PCSF is divided by and adjacent to SC Highway 11, which is also known as Cherokee Foothills Scenic Highway. SC Highway 11 was once part of the "Cherokee Path", which was used by the Cherokee Indians for fur trading. The Highway is designated as a National Scenic Byway, which is a road recognized by the United States Transportation for one or more of six intrinsic qualities (archeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, scenic). PCSF is located in the southernmost part of the Blue Ridge Mountains, which are a small part of the Appalachian Mountains. This area is also a must visit for locals and tourist to catch a glimpse of the fall color change of the mountain vegetation.

Our active forest management does not identify old growth conservation as a primary objective. However, in areas of limited access, within riparian areas, swamps, and other sites, we may allow for old growth conditions to remain or develop. Old growth

conditions vary due to cover type, soil type, aspect, and other site-specific conditions, therefore the presence of these conditions is determined on a site-by-site basis. As a self-supporting division within our agency, we often are not able to increase the rotation age of stands to that which resembles old growth conditions due to revenue needs.

### ***C. Ecologically Important Sites***

We utilize the SCDNR natural heritage species data to look for and identify critical species and habitats on the forest. Some of the communities identified in the natural heritage data to possibly exist at PCSF are hemlock forest and waterfalls. We also are aware of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The University of South Carolina (UofSC) has been utilized in the past for expertise on certain areas found to have importance. Data related to these critical sites is maintained in GIS system, and is available by request-only, to discourage site degradation from public access.

### ***D. Research, Science, Technology, Field Experience Used to Contribute to Biological Diversity***

PCSF collaborates with Universities, Colleges, other state and federal entities and reputable organizations to provide information, time and assistance for research opportunities that can provide for better management of forest resources. PCSF utilizes research and scientific data to manage for biological diversity across its boundaries and landscape. Research requests are captured through our special use permit, where individuals submit areas of interest for approval by PCSF. PCSF requires that these researchers submit findings and results of studies. Other types of biological diversity inventories are conducted on a consistent basis by staff and partners.

## **5. Management of Visual Quality and Recreational Benefits**

### ***A. Impact of Harvesting on Visual Quality***

Our visual constraints in harvesting are many. We limit harvest size, and manage for timing of harvest activity, to prevent large non-forested openings. We may leave aesthetic buffers along trail systems, or in areas heavily frequented by recreational users. However, in all these areas we violate our constraints during harvesting operations where we are converting from an undesirable species to a more desirable species. We have observed that in areas where aesthetic buffers are left, we often have difficulties later with seeding in of residual trees left. These decisions are made on a stand-by-stand basis.

Our road design management is done on a case-by-case basis. Most of the road work is maintenance. On the occasion we want to create a new road, we typically work with loggers to install following all BMPs and laws necessary for the area. Frequently we work with our timber contractors and operators to allow them to install decks and skid rows where best meets their needs. Due to the remoteness of most of our forest lands,

we do not generally consider the location of the deck a critical aesthetic concern, however we do work closely to minimize the size of the deck, any debris piles that may be left behind, and ensure that no litter or waste associated with the contractor are left on site. Enforcement of these rules follows the performance bond inclusion on the timber contract.

### ***B. Clearcut Harvests***

Poe Creek State Forest limits rotational harvest to 100 acres in total size. Due to the small amount of harvesting at PCSF, we consider our harvest planning as on the ground decision making. By limiting all rotational harvest to 100 acres or less in size, our average rotational harvest size will not exceed the sustainable forestry initiative (SFI) standard of 120-acre average.

### ***C. Green-up Requirement***

Poe Creek State Forest requires a green-up of 5 feet tall or 3 years post planting, before an adjacent stand can be rotationally harvested. This constraint is considered through our harvest planning.

### ***D. Recreational Opportunities***

The goal of the South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) is to provide outdoor recreational opportunities on the state forests that are compatible with forest management activities. The SCFC will strive to accommodate the needs of the various recreational user groups that enjoy the state forests. However, as is the case for forest management activities, management of recreational activities will not take precedence over the protection and enhancement of the environment. In addition, management for the sustainability of forest products will always take priority over recreation and other forest management activities.

There are a variety of recreational opportunities in South Carolina's state forests. In fact, the opportunities are as diverse as the forests themselves. Recreational opportunities at PCSF include hiking, picnicking, bird watching, and canoeing to name a few. Poe Creek State Forest is enrolled in the Wildlife Management Area (WMA) program, which is regulated by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR). Therefore, hunting and fishing on this state forest require applicable licenses and a WMA permit and is allowed only in designated areas during the appropriate seasons. For more detailed information on hunting and fishing activities, refer to the annual SCDNR Hunting and Fishing Regulations.

It is through sound multiple-use forest management that the SCFC plans to maintain the integrity of and enhance the state forest environment while providing for future natural resource uses, including recreation.

## **6. Protection of Special Sites**

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### **A. *Identify, Manage, and Protect Special Sites***

The South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) is aware of many special sites existing across our state forest lands system, and continues to maintain, preserve, and enhance these sites on an individual basis. Our regulations for all state forest lands clearly forbids metal detecting, collection of artifacts of any kind, digging on or damaging forest lands, or collection of any vegetative material without the express consent of the agency.

The location of some of these sites, specifically existing structures and cemeteries, are made available to the public with varying levels of access. However, many of the historical sites are considered sensitive, and information regarding their location is kept within the agency and made available on an individual basis.

Poe Creek State Forest (PCSF) maintains a GIS layer that includes special sites that exist on the forest. As sites are discovered, they are added to the GIS layer. This GIS data is only maintained in-house.

Examples of special sites include but are not limited to historic home sites, cemeteries, unique landforms, rare plant locations, archeological sites, unique habitats, and other historically significant sites.

## **7. Efficient Use of Fiber Resources**

### **A. *Forest Harvesting Technology, In-woods manufacturing Process to Minimize Waste and Ensure Efficient Utilization***

Poe Creek State Forest (PCSF) adheres to many principles of sustainable forestry and best use of forest products. All harvests conducted must be done in strict accordance with best management practices (BMP) guidelines, and we monitor harvesting operations to ensure compliance.

At Poe Creek State Forest, our regional location does not provide for strong markets for delivery of forest products, and we suffer significant decreases in stumpage values as a result. Since our primary management of this forest is not timber production, our harvest level is sporadic, and based on needed operations based on stand conditions. In cases where under low-grade material or poor value species are present, for instance our Virginia Pine upland stand, we are allowing natural stand replacement rather than harvesting as the revenue stream is not worth the risk to the resource, and the short-term impact to our viewshed. Similar conditions exist across the Forest, and only areas where stand health concerns and and/or viable revenue streams exist will be actively managed for timber.

We inspect post-harvest areas to ensure that site conditions outlined in each harvest contract are met. This includes the treatment of slash and debris, reductions in piles,



and that all stems above given diameter are removed. This ensure the site is better prepared for harvesting, burning, and/or receptive to seed dispersal from leave trees.

The South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) and state forest lands base our volume estimates on common diameter and height specifications. However, we do not translate these measurements into required log utilization specifications. Traditionally, we have allowed the harvest contractor to determine the optimal specifications for merchandizing. Similarly, as our timber harvesting is done under contract, we have not tried to impose restrictions on how that timber is merchandized or developed any incentives for the better utilization of off-grade wood.

Harvest operation sites are only monitored in relation to conditions as outlined in each harvest contract, which includes site conditions post-harvest, relative to slash, debris, and related factors. Our performance bond, included in each contract is used to ensure these conditions are met. However, since product utilization has not become a component of our stumpage marketing, we do not have any current assessments in place for that over site.

The state forest is a voting member of the South Carolina Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) state implementation committee (SIC). This committee is charged with maintaining, overseeing, and improving the SFI program through varies programs including logger training, teacher tours, children's programs, landowner meetings.

## **8. Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights**

### ***A. Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples' Rights***

PCSF recognizes the UN Declaration of the rights of Indigenous People. The SC Forestry Commission reaches out to the recognized tribes in the state when updating the state's Forest Action Plan.

Currently no state or federally indigenous peoples have claims relating to South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) state forest lands. As inventories and management activities are conducted should possible sites be discovered state forest manager and state lands coordinator are to be made aware. State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), State Commission of Minority Affairs, and state archeologist will be consulted.

### ***B. Confer with Possibly Affected Indigenous Peoples***

SCFC state forest manager and state lands coordinator shall confer with affected indigenous people with respect to sustainable forest management practices.

State forest manager and state lands coordinator shall confer with affected indigenous people seeking to:

- a. understand and respect traditional forest-related knowledge;
- b. identify and protect spiritually, historically, or culturally important sites;

- c. address the use of non-timber forest products of value to Indigenous Peoples
- d. communicate through processes that respect Indigenous Peoples' institutions
- e. provide opportunities to review forest management plans and forest management practices
- f. respond to Indigenous Peoples' inquiries and concerns received.

### **C. Communicate and Respond to Possibly Affected Indigenous Peoples**

Poe Creek State Forest (PCSF) will respond to inquiries and concerns of Indigenous People on Private lands as requested.

## **9. Climate Smart Forestry**

### **A. Identify and Address Risk to Forest and Forest Operations**

According to Climate Central, the top risks for South Carolina (SC) is extreme heat, increased wildfires, inland flooding and coastal flooding. Other sources, such as Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, list increasing drought and storm damage as significant risk factors tied to climate change. While the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that SC's temperature has increased by one-half to one degree (F) over the last century and sea levels are rising one to one-and-a-half inches every decade. The EPA also says higher temperatures and changes in rainfall are unlikely to substantially reduce forest cover in SC. SC could possibly see a shift in composition of forest cover type over time if climate change increases at current rates. The EPA list an additional risk to SC forest as a cause of heavy rainfall and drought conditions. This additional risk is an increase in insect and disease outbreaks.

Poe Creek State Forest (PCSF) cannot directly alter the potential adverse effects of climate change. However, there are things that we can and are doing to mitigate effects of climate change. One-way PCSF is addressing the potential risk of climate change is through our continual inventory program. Continually inventorying stands and recalculating standing volume numbers allows us to have a continuous update of data to observe short-term and long-term changes in timber growth. This updated inventory data is then used to update harvest model runs to maximize sustainability and provide a constant timber revenue stream. Other ways we can combat effects of climate change is by thinning stands when appropriate to minimize overcrowding, prescribe burning stands to reduce the build-up of fuels, and monitoring for overall forest health.

PCSF overall management aligns with southeast regional strategies to mitigate climate change. The *Southeast Regional Climate Hub Assessment of Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies* suggest strategies to combat climate change as diversity in seedling genetics, periodic thinning to reduce overcrowding, prescribe burning to reduce wildfire threat, harvesting rotations, site preparation, etc.

## **B. Effects Associated with Forest Operations**

PCSF is aware of and pursuing opportunities to sequester carbon while growing and harvesting timber on a sustainable basis. PCSF has submitted acreage to Natural Capital Exchange (NCX) for evaluation of selling forest carbon. NCX approach is based on science from Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). NCX strategy is to mitigate carbon release into the atmosphere by extending the lifecycle of a forest. Other ways that PCSF works to cut down on carbon released to the atmosphere is through biomass harvest. Biomass or fuel chip harvest are not very economically beneficial to PCSF, but they do benefit in other ways. By removing small under brush, PCSF is cutting down on the amount of carbon released into the atmosphere during beneficial prescribe burns and providing a resource for alternative fuel. Biomass harvests are sold to loggers which in turn end up at facilities to be burn for electricity, reducing the amount of need for coal-based electricity. This is a small but impactful contribution to the overall climate change.

The first step in looking at ways to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions in forestry operations is to identify the factors causing greenhouse gas emissions. The four main contributors to the greenhouse effect are carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and water vapor. According to the World Resource Institute, forestry represents 6% of the greenhouse gas emissions globally. The main forestry related issue contributing to greenhouse gas emission is deforestation. The more forest we harvest without replanting reduces the capacity to sequester carbon. A healthy and vigorously growing forest is our best solution to mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. The SCFC has created priority principles for land acquisition to increase and save the forest of SC from being repurposed to other uses. We are also involved with working with all conservation partners to conserve working forest land either by public ownership or conservation easements.

## **10. Fire Resilience and Awareness**

### **A. *Limit Susceptibility to Undesirable Impacts of Wildfire, Promote Healthy and Resilient Forest Conditions, and Support Restoration of Forest Damaged by Wildfire***

Poe Creek State Forest (PCSF) is part of a division of the South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) and the SCFC is the lead agency on wildfire in the state of SC. SCFC staff is trained to wildland firefighter stands that allow for in state and out of state response to wildfires. The SCFC employees law enforcement officers and firefighters that respond to uncontrolled wildfire for suppression. SCFC employees also provide wildland fire prevention material to the public. PCSF staff assist regional personal in initial and extended attack of wildfires throughout the state. PCSF personal also respond to request for wildfire assistance throughout the nation in various capacities from overhead to firefighters.

Other ways that PCSF prevents damage to timber stands is through sound forest management. Timber stands are routinely thinned to eliminate overcrowding and to reduce fuel loads. A thinned stand has a lot less potential of damage to trees than an unthinned stand due to open crown space allowing heat to escape. Thinning of stands also reduce the chance of infestation of insect and disease, which could cause death and mortality to stands. Stands are regularly prescribe burned to reduce fuel loads.

In cases where wildfires occur on the state forest, PCSF personnel will monitor areas for adverse impacts. If an area is damaged beyond recovery, either a salvage harvest is set up or a plan is put into place to reforest the area. Each incident is evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Fire breaks are always checked for proper best management practice when it comes to water quality. If actions are taken to that negatively affect the

### ***B. Raise Awareness of Benefits of Fire Management and Minimize Undesirable Impacts of Wildfire***

The SCFC has many different programs to promote the benefits of prescribe burning and to deter wildfire. The agency has published materials such as the Think Before you Burn brochure, which includes a guide to safe burning along with laws and precaution numbers required by law for outdoor burning. Other programs include Firewise USA, which is about wildland-urban interface burning. The SCFC has 3 employees that their sole jobs are dedicated to informing the public of potential wildfire issues within the wildland-urban interface.

Each year the SCFC has the month of March dedicated as fire prevention month by the state general assembly. During the month of March, SCFC employees pass out information to the public about wildfire potential and prescribe fire benefits. Promotional materials such as flyers, rulers, pamphlets, pencils, book covers, etc. are used to get the word out. Electronic materials such as television commercials, YouTube videos, and social media material are also distributed. Recently the agency has partnered with the national campaign of cancel wildfires in SC.

## **11. Legal and Regulatory Compliance**

### ***A. Local Forestry and Environmental Laws and Regulations***

The South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) and Poe Creek State Forest (PCSF) is committed to complying with all social laws, including but not limited to those covering civil rights, equal employment opportunities, gender equality, diversity inclusion, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment measures, workers' compensation, indigenous peoples' rights, communities' right to know, prevailing wages, workers' right to organize and occupational health and safety.

Forest personnel conduct post-harvest inspection, as well as site monitoring during harvesting as feasible, and address any issues as they arise. Site inspection includes

Best Management Practice (BMP) considerations as well as general site conditions following operator egress. In addition, we maintain an open line of communication with our contractors to allow them the opportunity to contact us as they encounter situations that may conflict with BMP guidelines, their contractual obligations, or other issues. Further opportunity is provided during post-harvest evaluation and any required mitigation work, which is terminated with the release of the performance bond.

Our agency personnel are made aware of all social laws, and rights of workers at time of hiring. In addition, our agency has a defined grievance policy for redress of conflicts as they may arise. All information required relevant to worker's rights is posted in a public area.

For our contractors, we include language in our contracts that requires the following is ensured for their employees:

- Workers compensation is provided to all employees
- Workers are provided with liability insurance
- Contractor will only employ legally allowed workers
- Contractor will abide by all federal, state, and local laws

### ***B. Comply with all Applicable Social Laws***

Several components are involved to ensure staff and contractors have access to relevant laws and regulations. Our forest personnel are provided with training in BMPs, and work closely with contractors through evaluation of contract obligations. Our contractors themselves are required to be Timber Operations Professional (TOP) Logger certified in the case of timber operations, and a trained tree planter when hired for planting operations. Adherence to BMPs and other provisions is required within the contract, with performance bond limits to ensure operators remain within those limitations. BMP guidelines and other relevant information is available through many venues, including headquarters of the forest operations. PCSF is aware of and supports the rights of workers and labor representatives outlined through the International Labor Organization (ILO). The ILO aims to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection, and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues for all people.

The state forest system employs a lawyer to look over contracts and any special issues that may arise, as needed.

## **12. Forestry Research, Science and Technology**

### ***A. Provide In-Kind Support or Funding for Forest Research***

As part of the South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) we are associated with many research opportunities, with the forest providing sites, data, and manpower when requested. Poe Creek State Forest (PSF) uses a special use permitting system to keep track of requested use of lands for research.

The agency has an insects and disease lab, which monitors for different activities across the state, as well as frequently on the state forest. This data is used both in-house and cooperatively with other state and federal agencies. The work conducted by this lab helps to identify threats and concerns associated with insect and disease outbreaks, and better prepares us to address these events as they occur.

The agency maintains its own tree improvement operations. Through association with our nurseries, we provide areas for research plantings, actively use nursery stock within our own operations, and serve as a benchmark for tree improvement performance over time. PCSF allows the nursery to use land for research such as orchards, progeny sites, and test plantings.

In some cases, our collective state forest system has provided land and data as outside support for other research requests, including chemical applications, tree improvement studies, biomass plantations and more.

Our agency also serves as the liaison for the conductance of forest inventory and analysis (FIA) for the state of South Carolina. Our agency employees conduct all plot sampling, with coordinated reporting of results which is used both internally and by the United States Forest Service (USFS).

#### ***B. Develop, contribute to, or Use Analyses in Support of Sustainable Forestry***

Through our association with the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), and through our direct participation of most of our state forests as a Wildlife Management Area (WMA), much of the work performed on biological diversity and wildlife management has fallen under their purview. We work together to collect data on population surveys.

We consider our role more associated with providing access and land for research plots where possible as our method of supporting forest research, rather than through direct financial contributions.

Our agency has also been the state compliance monitor for Best Management Practices (BMPs) and have generated annual reports of compliance for many years, and multi-year analysis of compliance in white papers and peer-reviewed journal publications.

The SCFC and state forest personnel, served as lead reporters and committee researchers in a comprehensive analysis of the state, finalized in the South Carolina State Forest Resource Assessment (Forest Action Plan).

The SCFC and the state forest system are a voting member of the SFI State Implementation Committee (SIC). Through this membership we have the power to vote on issues that will impact sustainability of forest and forest products in SC.

The SCFC is the lead instructor for the wood magic forest fair, the South Carolina teacher's tour, project learning tree, etc. We are also highly involved in the implementation of the Top Logger program and monitor logging operations through state BMPs.

## **13. Training and Education**

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### ***A. Appropriate Training of Personnel and Contractors***

The South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) and Poe Creek State Forest (PCSF) are devoted to communicating our commitment to the sustainable forestry initiative (SFI) forest management standards through an open letter from our state forester and through a letter sent to all our contractors of our involvement with the SFI standards. These letters can be found on our website.

A training matrix has been developed and utilized to determine the training and amount of training required for each of the different roles of employees on the state forest. Additionally, the agency has implemented a program to provide salary increases as incentive to participate in training to build Additional Skills and Knowledge (A.S.K. Raises).

Contractors are required to have sufficient training in their related field of professionalism. Examples include loggers must be TOP Logger certified, foresters must be state registered, tree planters must be trained through the SCFC, pesticide applicators must be licensed, etc.

### ***B. Foster Improvement in the Professionalism of Wood Producers***

Through our participation in the South Carolina implementation committee and the Forestry Association of South Carolina, we get the opportunity to work with cooperatives to create specialized training to improve forest operations. Some of the trainings include state best management practices (BMPs), Top Logger certifications, educational programs, etc.

## **14. Community Involvement in the Practice of Sustainable Forestry**

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### ***A. Landowner Cooperative Programs***

The agency, and forest personnel, provide support, mostly in the terms of time, for the following SIC programs.

- Project Learning Tree
- Wood Magic Forest Fair
- Teachers Tour
- SIC Grants

- SIC Meetings

These different programs require different assistance. In previous years, the state forest system at large has served as the location and facility support for all these events. Personnel have provided event support and will continue to do so. Lastly, some personnel work with these programs as part of their day-to-day functions, providing, at least indirectly, some financial support in terms of staffing.

The development and distribution of educational material to forest landowners has, in years past, fallen under the supervision and direction of other entities within the agency. Still, we provide educational materials on site at each state forest and participate in a leadership role in landowner and educational tours on our lands.

From an agency perspective, conservation of managed forests has been addressed through cost-share programs. Under our state forest system specifically, we have provided facilities and program support, although generally on an as-needed basis.

Generally, the forests are part of the SCFC LMP (landscape management plan) as well as the forest action plan which pertains to regional conservation planning efforts.

#### ***B. Public Outreach, Education, and Involvement***

Our outreach participation, as previously described elsewhere, is through leadership and participation in the Wood Magic Forest Fair, Teacher's Tour, and Project Learning Tree programs.

Our public educational opportunities are many. Across the state forest system, we participate in Future Farmers of America (FFA) events, conduct field tours, provided training and educational opportunities to local schools, provide volunteer opportunities to various groups, and have developed or are in the process of developing self-guided tours, respectively. In addition, personnel frequently provide their services, through speaking engagements and teaching opportunities, to many schools, groups, conferences, and other users on an annual or by request basis.

#### ***C. Stakeholder Concerns***

There are many avenues through which public inquiries can be made and subsequent response actions taken. The agency, and forests alike, use interpersonal communications, social media, regular postal and email, and other avenues as they arise to take concerns and inquiries for our actions. These inquiries are then directed to the appropriate parties, researched, and then responded to in a timely fashion.

The agency and state forest system will address stakeholder concerns regarding apparent nonconforming practices on an individual basis.

## **15. Public Land Management Responsibilities**

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### **A. Public Land Planning and Management Processes**

The state forest system is involved in land management planning in many venues. Following these guidelines, we continue to update and adapt a management plan specific for each state forest, which more closely addresses their respective objectives and relative concerns. Finally, and in concert with our management plans, a harvest schedule model has been developed, which supplies additional data for our forest system to better meet its needs.

Contact with local stakeholders over forest management issues is provided through many relationships, associations, and previously mentioned venues, as described elsewhere. Various trail groups, riding associations, and other organizations have, over time, developed lines of communication with our forest personnel, from interpersonal to regular meetings, where concerns over respected issues can be brought forward, or addressed collectively. However, the state forest position has, to this point, been to address concerns or requests on an as-needed basis, rather than to seek out the inputs of any given group.

We address issues or events when they arise, making appropriate contact with stakeholders when necessary, and taken any corrective actions, as deemed appropriate.

## **16. Communications and Public Reporting**

### **A. Summary Audit Report**

Upon completion of our management plans tailored to the most current standard, we shall submit our documents to the certification body for auditing. These documents will be assessed for content, and congruence to the sustainable forestry initiative (SFI) Standards, and the results will be submitted to SFI Inc. for posting to an external website. We shall also maintain all records of our audits for certification or recertification on hand at our forestry commission headquarters in Columbia, SC, as well as each respective state forest. We shall also work towards developing a documentation library, to better facilitate the auditing process.

### **B. Annual Conformance Report**

The state lands coordinator is responsible for SFI Standard adherence, and for collating data and preparing and submitting annual progress reports to SFI Inc. Reporting will be conducted in congruence with the SFI program.

## **17. Management Review and Continual Improvement**

## **A. Review System**

The agency and state forests will use the following categories and associated criteria in the evaluation of the effectiveness of SFI programs and achieving continuous improvement in performance:

- a.** Improved effectiveness of management process
  - i. Operational improvements
  - ii. Streamlined management
  - iii. Improved review process to meet standard
- b.** Realized increases in SFI certified wood and wood products
  - i. Enhanced revenue stream
  - ii. Increased participation of contractors
- c.** Improved recognition of our leadership or exemplary status in sustainable forest management
  - i. Increased request for SFI literature or information
  - ii. Increased appearance of agency in relevant publications and literature
  - iii. Increased request for our participation in events or literature related to forest sustainability